LeBron who, LeShmon. Who needs the guy? The Cavs improved to 8-2 all-time without King James, taking the Golden State Warriors out behind the woodshed for a vicious 124-97 beating last night. The game marked the beginning of The Boobie Gibson Era at point guard, and also featured a career high point performance from Sasha Pavlovic (pictured). This was a fun game to watch, and there wasn't much to dislike, which John Hnat affirms in his morning wrap.

THE SUMMARY:

124 – 97.

That's right, the Cavs scored 124 points against the Golden State ("Who Called Us Oakland?") Warriors. It was a season high for the Cavs, easily besting the 115 points they scored against Philadelphia (and that game went into two overtimes).

Eight Cavs scored in double figures: Sasha Pavlovic with a career-high 24; Donyell Marshall with 15; Zydrunas Ilgauskas with 14; Daniel Gibson with 12; Larry Hughes, Drew Gooden, and David Wesley all with 11 apiece; and Damon Jones with 10. (Anderson Varejao just missed joining the club; he scored 9.) They shot almost 50% from the field (42-85) and better than 50% from three-point range (12-22).

Did I mention that they did all of this without LeBron James? LeBron was nursing the injured big toe that also kept him out of the game at Philadelphia last Friday. Instead of being hurt by the loss, the Cavs stepped up their game, and played probably their most complete game of the season.

Cleveland jumped out to a commanding 37-22 lead by the end of the first quarter, aided by a quarter-ending 19-4 run. Gibson, who started at point guard, immediately got the Cavs working on offense, as he provided assists to Ilgauskas on a jumper and to Hughes on a layup. The real key was the Cavs' defense; they stole the ball from Golden State five times in the waning minutes of the quarter, leading to 11 points for the Cavs.

The Warriors never got any closer than 10 points the rest of the way. The Cavs extended their lead to 20 points by halftime, at 67-47. Golden State did slice the lead to 12 points near the end of the third quarter. The Cavs then reeled off 22 of the next 30 points, culminating with a Pavlovic three-pointer that stretched the lead to 110-84. Not that the game was in much doubt before that, but Pavlovic's shot effectively ended the game, as both coaches put in their Human Victory Cigar/Human White Flag players moments later.

Baron Davis, who did not play the first time the two teams met earlier this month, led the Warriors with 21 points.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

LeBron Who?: It's official. The Cavs are a better team without LeBron James than with him.

No, that doesn't mean that the Cavs should trade King James, or encourage him to take the rest of the season off to heal his injured toe. Don't be silly. But when LeBron is not on the

court, the Cavs are a different team. Knowing that they can't stand around and wait for LeBron to bail them out, they play a real offense. They bring the ball up court quicker. They pass the ball more frequently and with more purpose. They work their way into better shots, and they hit more of them.

The bottom line: This game was the best game that the Cavs have played all season. They keep playing like this, and the talk about them slipping out of the playoffs will disappear faster than sensible hair on Scot Pollard's head.

Can we dream for a minute? Can we imagine the Cavs team that we saw tonight, with LeBron also being part of the mix? Can we see a team in which somebody other than LeBron brings the ball up court, and allows LeBron to slash or post up or do any of the other things he does best (read: not jacking up off-balance jumpers from 20 feet)?

Those questions are most likely to be answered by the coaching staff. Which brings me to...

The Clipboard: It's Not Just For Doodling Any More: The coaching staff deserves credit for playing a more up-tempo style of offense. Instead of slowly dribbling the ball up court (a frequent target of my criticism in the past), the Cavs were routinely in the Warriors' front court within three or four seconds. As such, Golden State had that much less time to get into any kind of defensive position (not like they have Bill Russell in the pivot, but still), and that led to a lot of easy baskets for the Cavs. In recent weeks, both LeBron and Larry Hughes have taken exception with the way the offense has been run. I don't know if last night's approach was a response to those criticisms; and frankly, I do not care. Whatever it takes to see a more efficient offense is fine with me.

Hopefully, last night's game also showed that having an up-tempo offense and a lock-down defense are not mutually exclusive items. It's not like you have to choose. There's no reason why you cannot play tough defense while still having a high-octane offense. Indeed, they are rather complementary. The steals and turnovers that you force with tough defense often lead to fast breaks at the offensive end.

The Sight Of The Deer Leaving The Headlights: Pavlovic, starting in James' place, had a terrific game. As mentioned, his 24 points were a career high, and he took only 11 shots from the field, so it wasn't like he pulled a Marbury to get those points. He is looking much more comfortable on the floor. It's not news that he provides a very intriguing combination of athleticism (he had another big dunk against the Warriors) and outside shooting. It is news that he is actually putting those components together to become a useful player ... and is also minimizing the boneheaded mistakes that were his hallmark earlier in his career. (By “earlier”, I mean “as recently as two weeks ago”.)

Making Me Look Like A Genius Yet Again: Ever since I wondered whether Marshall was nearing the end of the line, Donyell has gone out of his way to make me look stupid. Any time you have more points (15) than minutes played (14), you must be doing something right. In the interest of keeping him productive, I would like to say that Marshall has nothing to offer this team, and looks like he should hang them up. (With that, Donyell should go off for 30 against the Heat.)

A Point Guard And A Gentleman: Give Eric Snow credit. After 139 straight games as a starter for the Cavs, he found himself in the unfamiliar position of coming off the bench against the Warriors. A lesser man would have pouted and/or mailed in his effort. Instead, Snow provided a real spark off the bench ... not so much in points scored (duh!), but in the way he kept the offense moving. He dished out six assists in only 16 minutes. More impressively, he was bringing the ball up the court quickly, before Golden State had much chance to establish its defense, and he drove to the hoop on several occasions, typically kicking the ball to an open teammate. He also forced a couple of turnovers at the defensive end. This Eric Snow, in this role, can help the Cavs.

The Drought Is Over: With 4:24 remaining in the game, Dwayne Jones hit the second of two free throws, his first point of the season. Every Cavalier has now scored this season. Dwayne later hit another pair of free throws, giving him three points for the game (and season). Not to be outdone, fellow end-of-the-bencher Scot Pollard also scored three points, including his first field goal of the season.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Two To Four Inches, My Ass: As I write this, it's still snowing here. It's been snowing all day. I've had to brush my car about ten times today, and had to use halftime (which is normally set aside for surfing for por … er, doing intense research for this column) to speed-shovel the driveway. (Never knew that I could get 'er done in ten minutes.)

You're right; that technically doesn't have anything to do with the game. But it's tough to be a pessimist after a showing like the one the Cavs just put up. That's all I have on the negative side.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs travel to South Beach to take on the Heat (you think we've been disappointed with the Cavs recently? Think about how Heat Fan feels these days) on Thursday evening, then fly right back to Cleveland to take on Charlotte on Friday night.